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5.3.22 Augmentative and Alternative Communication Devices

Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices help individuals with severe communication impairments to meet their functional communication needs.

HCPCS Procedure Code	Description
E1902	Communication board, non-electronic augmentative or alternative communication device
E2500	Speech generating device, digitized speech, using pre-recorded messages, less than or equal to eight minutes recording time
E2502	Speech generating device, digitized speech, using prerecorded messages, greater than eight minutes but less than or equal to 20 minutes recording time
E2504	Speech generating device, digitized speech, using prerecorded messages, greater than 20 minutes but less than or equal to 40 minutes recording time
E2506	Speech generating device, digitized speech, using prerecorded messages, greater than 40 minutes recording time
E2508	Speech generating device, synthesized speech, requiring message formulation by spelling and access by physical contact with the device
E2510	Speech generating device, synthesized speech, permitting multiple methods of message formulation and multiple methods of device access
E2511	Speech generating software program, for personal computer or personal digital assistant
E2512	Accessory for speech generating device, mounting system
E2599	Accessory for speech generating device, not otherwise classified
V5336	Repair/modification of augmentative communicative system or device (excludes adaptive hearing aid)

AAC devices are covered when they meet the following conditions:

- the device is determined to be medically necessary;
- the device is a dedicated communication device;
- it is used solely by the recipient; and
- the recipient has a long-term severe communication impairment.

Note: A dedicated device is defined as a device that will be used only for communication purposes.

The device may take any of several forms:

- A manual device that uses orthographic or picture symbols
- A device that produces digitized speech output, using pre-recorded messages (these are typically classified by how much recording time they offer)
- A device that produces synthesized speech output, with messages formulated either by direct selection techniques or by any of multiple methods

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Note: A laptop computer, desktop computer, personal digital assistant, or other device that has not been modified to run AAC software and is not a device that will be used only for communication purposes (that is, a dedicated device) will not be covered. Laptop computers, personal computers, and personal digital assistants used for purposes other than communication are not primarily medical in nature and do not meet the definition of DME.

AAC software will be covered when a recipient has a laptop computer, desktop computer, or personal digital device in which software can be added to adapt the device for communication purposes.

Prior Approval and Medical Necessity

Speech-generating devices that produce synthesized speech (HCPCS procedure codes E2508 or E2510) require prior approval. To document medical necessity for prior approval, submit the CMN/PA form with the following documentation:

- a. A physician's report with a description of the recipient's current medical status and history
- b. A physician's order for the AAC device, including an itemization of the components (switches, special mounting devices, etc.) required by the recipient
- c. An AAC device evaluation performed by a licensed speech-language pathologist who fulfills either requirements 1 and 3, or requirements 2 and 3, below:
 1. Has a valid license issued by the North Carolina Speech and Language Pathologists and Audiologists Board of Examiners, *and* has a Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC) from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)
 2. Has either completed the equivalent educational requirements and work experience necessary for the CCC, *or* has completed the academic program and is acquiring supervised work experience to qualify for the CCC
 3. Has the education and experience in augmentative communication necessary to assess an individual and prescribe an AAC aid, system, or device that will maximize that individual's effective and functional communication

[These education and experience requirements are listed in *Augmentative and Alternative Communication: Knowledge and Skills for Service Delivery*, ASHA Supplement 22 (2002), 97-106.]

Note: The AAC device evaluation should include all of the following information:

1. The language skills, oral and motor speech status, and type and severity of current communication impairment(s) that affect the recipient's abilities to communicate with and without the AAC device
2. A detailed description of the therapeutic history in the areas of speech-language pathology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy, including the nature, frequency, and duration of treatment and the specific speech-language therapy approaches that have been tried in relation to the need for and use of an AAC device

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3. A detailed description of related impairments, including audiovisual, perceptual, cognitive level, and memory deficits, that would limit the recipient's ability to use a device, or that would require the use of a particular AAC device
4. A detailed description of each communication device or method of communication tried by the recipient in the past and information on the effectiveness of each
5. Specific information about the requested device, including the manufacturer's name, catalog number, product description, and list of accessories requested; justification for and use to be made of the device and accessories; and documentation of the manufacturer's price quote
6. An explanation of the medical necessity of the AAC device, including how the device will be used in the home or in other settings and a statement that the device will be required for 12 months or longer
7. Demonstration that the recipient possesses a treatment plan that includes a training schedule for the selected device (technical assistance from the AAC vendor must include training on the use of the AAC device)
8. A statement that the speech-language pathologist performing the AAC device evaluation is neither an employee of nor has a financial relationship with the vendor of the AAC device

Note: Medical necessity must be proven even if prior approval is not required. Therefore, the above-listed requirements also apply to devices that do not require prior approval. In this instance, the information necessary to establish medical necessity must be kept in the recipient's confidential file by the speech-language pathologist responsible for ordering the device.

Rental Period

Any AAC device requiring prior approval must be rented for a one-month period before N.C. Medicaid will purchase it. All components necessary for the use of the device—such as software (E2511), accessories (E2512), and mounting devices (E2599)—must be evaluated during this rental period. The rental fees for the one month period will be applied to the total purchase price. If during the one-month rental the initially approved device is effective for the recipient's communication needs, submit a request for prior approval of purchase of the device. The request must document the effectiveness of the rented device.

When an AAC system is not available for rental, prior approval for purchase may be granted with adequate supporting documentation that the recipient has had recent experience and achieved effective communication with the requested AAC.

A rental period is not required when replacing an existing AAC system unless the recipient's needs have changed and another AAC system is being considered.

Costs, Repairs, and Replacements

The cost of the AAC device, software (including software upgrades necessary to expand or improve the function of the AAC device), mounting system, accessories, and repairs for one recipient shall not exceed \$9,500 for a two-year period. Technical assistance from a qualified augmentative communication

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technology professional also includes training on use of the AAC equipment and is included in the total purchase price for the AAC device. Technical assistance may not duplicate evaluation and services provided by licensed speech, occupational, or physical therapists.

Repairs of AAC devices must not exceed \$500 annually. Requests for repairs in excess of the capped amount must be approved in advance. See **Section 5.8** for details.

The lifetime expectancy for all AAC devices is three years. An AAC device may be modified or replaced in one of the following situations:

- a. The recipient's medical, cognitive, or physical status changes in such a way as to significantly alter the effectiveness of the device.
- b. The AAC device is no longer functional and cannot be repaired.
- c. The manufacturer's warranty or other applicable warranty has expired and repairs to the AAC device are no longer cost effective. An identical or comparable component(s) will be provided if there is documentation from a licensed speech-language pathologist that the AAC device is still effective and appropriate for the recipient's needs.
- d. The device is under manufacturer's warranty, but the repair is not covered by the warranty. Submit documentation from the manufacturer explaining the reason that the repair is not covered.
- e. The AAC device has been damaged or stolen. Submit a copy of the police or fire report if appropriate, and detail the measures to be taken to prevent reoccurrence. See **Section 5.9** for details.

Note: All documentation of the history of service, maintenance, and repair of the device must accompany such a request. N.C. Medicaid will not purchase an extended manufacturer's warranty for any AAC device.